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## Now Gov. Cuomo is investigating a landlord for tenant harassment

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**BY ZACH WILLIAMS** | State government scrutiny of local landlords extended on Aug. 20 to Marolda Properties for alleged tenant harassment in Chinatown and the Lower East Side.

Governor Andrew Cuomo issued a subpoena to the company that day as part of an ongoing investigation under the state Tenant Protection Unit. Tenant grievances against Marolda include eviction proceedings, low buyout offers, poor building services and the denial of lease renewals for longtime tenants, according to a statement by Cuomo.

“This case is especially egregious because it appears this landlord preys on many tenants who are elderly and whose primary language is not English,” Cuomo said in the statement. Cuomo’s announcement follows on the heels of state Attorney General Eric Schneiderman’s probe into the practices of landlord Steven Croman.

For its part, Marolda has also investigated tenants in an effort to acquire evidence that their primary residence is elsewhere, allowing it to begin eviction proceedings.

“The landlord’s been sending a lot of notices to people saying that we don’t live in this building, that we have property somewhere else.... I’ve lived here all my life,” said one 20-something tenant who requested her name be withheld due to pending litigation.

The tenant will appear in Housing Court later this month to attempt to disprove Marolda’s allegation in a lawsuit against her that her primary residence is in Brooklyn rather than on Elizabeth St.

Marolda Properties owns about 70 buildings throughout the five boroughs. Phone messages left for Fred Marolda were not returned by press time. A Marolda representative who answered the phone Aug. 25 and identified himself as Greg declined to comment.

At a Marolda-owned building on Forsyth St., outgoing tenant Grier Newlin said there were months of seemingly endless noise as the landlord renovated the place’s interior. Then tenants and building management met, with management agreeing to post better notice, in both English and Chinese, of upcoming work.

Nonetheless, the building’s makeup has changed significantly in those 11 months, according to Newlin, who said he is moving out in a few weeks.

“It was primarily Chinese when I moved in and now it’s not,” he said.

Such a change reflects an ongoing trend in Chinatown, according to the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund. In a report released last year on Chinatowns in New York City, Boston and Philadelphia, AALDEF notes that white residents are the fastest-growing demographic in the neighborhood.

“Tenants have experienced more harassment by landlords in the past decade,” the report states. “The occupants of rent-regulated units have shifted from immigrant family households to a younger demographic, including young professionals and students.”

Marolda opponents cite the case of an elderly woman reportedly refused a lease extension by the company. An effort to evict her failed once her links to a local community senior center, among other things, buttressed her claim that she had lived in the building for 40 years.

“Her entire social structure is limited to the five or so blocks surrounding her building,” said Cathy Dang, executive director of the Committee Against Anti-Asian Violence Organizing Asian Communities, in a statement. “Marolda’s actions fly in the face of the history of Chinatown and the Lower East Side — communities built by immigrants, and communities sustained by affordable housing that contribute to the unique culture of New York City.”

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Meanwhile, in the court of consumer opinion, tenant reviews of Marolda Properties on Yelp are mixed. The company received a two-star rating among 20 online reviews from what appear to be relatively new tenants.

"I lived in a Marolda building (262 Elizabeth St.) for two years," wrote a poster under the name Ty M in April 2013. "The building was always clean and well-maintained, and they were perfectly fair with my security deposit. Yes, they were a little difficult to get a hold of; but I believe I had an above-average renter experience with them."

However, 16 of the reviews were negative in tone.

"I've thought about a dozen different ways that I could write this review and how best to describe how much I loathe this company," wrote Brett M. in Aug. 2013. "But, I figured it was best to just lay it out there: they're horrible.

"They're the least professional people I've ever encountered, and every time I interact with them, I feel like I just got punched in the brain because of the incompetence."

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